

VZCZCXRO5837  
PP RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK RUEHMOS  
DE RUEHBC #0077/01 1360912  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P R 160912Z MAY 06  
FM REO BASRAH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0342  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0361

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000077

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/16/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [KJUS](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: BLEAK BUT IMPROVING - PRISON CONDITIONS IN SOUTHERN IRAQ

BASRAH 00000077 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Regional Coordinator, REO Basrah,  
Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) Summary: Prison conditions in southern Iraq are comparable to those of a poor third world country -- bleak and dismal. However, real progress has been made, and despite political pressure the Regional Director of Prisons for southern Iraq is committed to improving prison and related human rights conditions in the four correction facilities that he oversees. The two main issues of concern are the housing women and juveniles in the same facilities as the adult male population and the deteriorating facilities. Iraqis working in corrections continue to cooperate with Coalition Forces, seeking assistance and guidance despite recent disengagement by some provincial governments. End summary.

#### PRISONS IN THE SOUTH

-----

¶2. (U) There are currently five Ministry of Justice (MoJ) detention facilities in the four southern provinces of Basrah, Maysan, Muthanna and Dhi Qar and one MNF-I theater-level detention facility called Camp Bucca. One new prison is being constructed with U.S. Government funds, and the MoJ has proposed building a new prison but awaits final approval and funding.

¶3. (SBU) Basrah province is home to the Al Maqel and Al Minah prisons and Camp Bucca. Al Maqel prison houses approximately 300 inmates, and Al Minah prison has approximately 400 inmates; the detention facility at Camp Bucca holds approximately 9,000 detainees. Maysan province's prison, Al Amarah, houses approximately 500 inmates. Nasiriyah prison in Dhi Qar province has approximately 450 inmates, and Samawah prison in Muthanna province is home to approximately 250 inmates.

¶4. (SBU) The U.S. Government is funding construction of a new prison in Nasiriyah, which when completed in 2007, will hold 800 inmates, almost doubling the capacity of the current prison. There is a proposal to build a new prison in Basrah that would house all of the inmates currently in the Al Maqel and Al Minah prisons. The proposed prison would hold approximately 1,200 inmates (more than the combined total of the two existing prisons). The site has been identified and existing buildings on the site need renovation and must be converted to a detention facility, but that should not be a major construction project. The delay in moving ahead with approval involves transferring the title of the land to the MoJ. Almost every contact polloff spoke with lamented the holdup in opening the new prison and expressed how urgently it is needed.

¶15. (U) The Regional Director of Prisons, Mazzin Afal Maniam Jabbar, oversees all of the prisons under MoJ control in the four southern provinces. Leadership within the prisons consists of a warden, deputy warden and an administrative manager. Very little autonomy is given to the leadership within the prisons, and the MoJ in Baghdad determines the selection of candidates for these positions after reviewing recommendations from the Regional Director. The Regional Director works very closely with the Director General of Iraqi Corrections Facilities based in Baghdad and with the MoJ.

¶16. (C) In a meeting with REO poloff, Mazzin said that Basrah is the most difficult of the four provinces in terms of oversight because of political pressure and, as he put it, people trying to interfere in his work. The main culprit is the Governor of Basrah, Mohammed Moassibh al-Wa'eli. According to Mazzin, the Governor tried to pressure Mazzin to allow him to recruit prison guards for the prison at Camp Bucca and has repeatedly tried to have prisoners released without proper documentation. Mazzin said that he knows of the Governor's past and present criminal activities and said to poloff, "Can you imagine what he would do if he were in control of 1,500 prison guards at Bucca?" Mazzin stressed to poloff that as the Regional Director of the four provinces, the Governor had no authority over him and he takes his orders directly from Baghdad.

¶17. (C) Comment: Mazzin is genuine in his efforts to improve the conditions in the prisons in his domain. Backed by a solid reputation and support from the MoJ and the religious community in Basrah, he maintains the ability and authority to do his job without political influence. Although his life is directly threatened on a regular basis and his affiliation with MNF-I is constantly used against him by his critics, Mazzin vows to continue to do his job to the best of his ability and improve the corrections facilities for both the prisoners and the staff

BASRAH 00000077 002.2 OF 002

that work in them. He said that with the help of the United States and the United Kingdom, the prison system in the south has made significant improvements. Though he is often called a traitor and an agent of the Coalition, he understands the assistance and expertise the Coalition can provide to him to improve the conditions in prisons. End comment.

#### CURRENT CHALLENGES

-----

¶18. (SBU) Poloff discussed the state of prisons and related human rights issues with various local Iraqi contacts, including Mazzin, Mahdi al-Timimi, Director General of Human Rights (DGHR) for southern Iraq, Imam Hasneen al-Safi, member of the Basrah Provincial Council (BPC) and focal point for human rights for the Basrah Provincial Reconstruction and Development Committee, and Bassam al-Timimi, chief of a human rights NGO. Poloff also received input from the REO corrections advisor.

¶19. (SBU) The main concern expressed by all contacts was the lack of separate facilities for women and juveniles. Women and juveniles are held in the same facilities with the adult male population in all of the MoJ controlled facilities. This co-habitation is difficult on many levels, especially in a culture where women should not be seen by men they do not know. Due to this cultural taboo and lack of female guards, women are rarely giving any outdoor time and remain cooped up in their cells. Juveniles are held with the adult population and do not have access to books or recreational activities. BPC member Hasneen al-Safi said that if the youth do not have enough to do while incarcerated they will only learn more criminal ways and return to a life of crime upon release. Al-Safi said that the BPC requested that the Basrah Sports Institute donate sports equipment for the prisons but never received a response.

¶10. (SBU) The condition of the prisons themselves is also a

major concern. Many of the prisons are extremely old and are in a state of disrepair and decay. The largest prison in Basrah, Al Magel prison, is a very old structure that is leaking and falling apart, has no hot water during the winter and only recently had a shaded area constructed for prisoners outdoors. No maintenance is being done on the building. Al Amarah prison in Maysan province is also deteriorating, and the inability to do upkeep is affecting security at the prison. Recently, a prisoner escaped by cutting a hole in a fence. When the REO corrections advisor inquired a month later to see if the hole had been fixed the answer was negative. An insufficient number of beds contributes to the problem, and many inmates are forced to sleep on the floor in crowded cells.

¶11. (SBU) Overall, the consensus among REO contacts is that the prisoner rights situation within in the prisons is gradually improving. Mahdi al-Timimi told poloff that the situation in the prisons now is very different than it was a year ago and that progress has been made in the way guards treat and deal with inmates. There also is adequate monitoring of the prisons by the Regional Director and the DGHR, both of whom submit weekly reports to Baghdad. The prison authorities are working to correct the deficiencies.

¶12. (C) Comment: A functioning corrections system with proper safeguards for the rights of prisoners is integral to achieving the rule of law. The correctional institutions started this process from scratch. After over three decades of a brutal regime in which prisons were used as torture chambers and were filled with anyone the government was unhappy with, the corrections system has made significant progress in three years.

Although some of the local governments in the south have at times disengaged from or boycotted Coalition forces, the one sector that seems to ignore politics is corrections. The Iraqis who work in this area understand the importance of the assistance and knowledge that Coalition members provide and are willing to work together to achieve their goals of good corrections facilities with well-trained staff. However, working closely with Coalition forces may have caused too much dependence. The REO corrections advisor commented to poloff that after three years Coalition Forces are still making decisions and plans for the Iraqis, and the time has come for the Iraqis to take ownership. Decision making and planning are skills still needed when the prison at Camp Bucca is turned over to the Iraqis (estimated to happen in 2007), and they will have to go from overseeing 2,000 inmates in the region to close to 9,000. End comment.

GROSS